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SUBJECT: MAGYAR GARDA - TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS?

REF: (a) Budapest 343 and previous (b) Budapest 663 and previous

¶1. Summary: The Budapest Municipal Court held the third round of hearings concerning the Budapest Prosecutor's civil suit against the far-right Jobbik Party's Magyar Garda on June 30. The hearing attracted numerous onlookers, both for and against declaring the organization unlawful. Conducted in an atmosphere of increased Magyar Garda anti-Roma activity, particularly in smaller Hungarian communities, the Court deferred any decision to at least the next session in early September. End Summary.

¶2. The Magyar Garda Association (MGA) was registered with the court on June 18, 2007 as a legally chartered organization. The Budapest Prosecutor's Office initiated a civil suit in late 2007 on charges that the Magyar Garda engaged in illegal activity when it mounted an anti-Roma march in Tatarszentgyorgy, on December 9. Organizations joining the lawsuit for the plaintiff include the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (MAZSIHISZ), the National Roma Self-Government (OCO), the Party of Hungarian Minorities, and the Interest Group of Hungarian National and Ethnic Minorities. Interestingly, a private citizen of Jewish origin has registered in support of the MGA.

¶3. The paramilitary group of the far-right Jobbik party, the MGA, initially included more than 1600 members (ref A), but recent legal maneuverings reduced the number to ten. (Note: the minimum requirement to form an association is ten members according to Hungarian law. End note.) "Former" MGA members have now formed the Magyar Garda Movement (MGM), which, according to MGA President Gabor Vona, is a separate organization. Vona argues that, since the current legal proceedings only address the MGA, if the court ruling dissolves the Magyar Garda Association, the MGM will be able to continue its activities because it has no charter and, as such, is not an established entity under the law.

¶4. During the June 30 court hearing, the prosecutor attempted to prove the link existing between the Association and the Movement, presenting bank statements showing transfers to the Association's account from individuals who are members of the Magyar Garda Movement but not the Association. In response, Vona said he would send such deposits to the MGM without any delay, as these transfers are only "mistakes."

Magyar Garda - on call: anytime, anywhere

¶5. Since the launch of the lawsuit, Magyar Garda members continue to stage marches in small towns and villages, calling for "improved public safety in rural Hungary" while carrying the red-and-white striped "Arpad" flag and dressed in their uniforms associated with the WWII fascist Hungarian Arrow Cross Party. These demonstrations have often evoked counter-demonstrations from Roma and anti-fascist groups.

¶6. On June 13, several days after the Molotov Cocktail attacks in the village of Patka (ref B), approximately one hundred MG members "responded" to a late-evening call from a non-Roma family "fleeing" (according to press reporting) from the village of Galgagyork. A

lengthy legal dispute with a Roma family over occupancy of a house precipitated the call for help. (Note: The ability of the Magyar Garda to respond in force to a late evening call from a small village reflects a rather mature communications system capability. End note.) The evening prior to the call for MG assistance, two Roma families' houses were broken into, causing approximately USD 2000 in damages. The Roma families claim that MG members, shouting "come out Gypsies, we'll make a Gypsy Holocaust for you," were the perpetrators. The police are investigating the incident but currently have no evidence of MG involvement.

¶7. On June 21, two local government officials from the village of Fadd, one of them Roma, invited the Magyar Garda and the nationalist Goy Riders motorcyclists group to a village festival in order to "provide the full force of the law" to a few local Roma families who allegedly live off criminal activities. Approximately 150 MG members and 40 motorcyclists marched/rode through the streets of the village without incident. Viktoria Mohacsi, the Roma Hungarian member of the European Parliament, and recently selected head of the minority forum of the U.N. Human Rights Council, made an appearance as well. County Roma leaders described the march as a provocation intended to humiliate and intimidate the Roma community of the village.

¶8. As Magyar Garda increase their anti-Roma activities around the country, the Court's decision to postpone further hearings on the group's legal status leaves the door open for further confrontations over the summer. Orban Kolompar, head of the OCO, highlighted that concern when he asked the court not to postpone the decision on the Magyar Garda case, stating, "I cannot take responsibility for Roma people any longer, as tensions between Roma and Hungarians have reached a breaking point."

¶9. Comment. The Magyar Garda's activities continue to resonate in Hungarian society. As political analyst Laszlo Keri commented, the Garda has succeeded in moving its agenda into mainstream discussion. The legal maneuverings by Jobbik/MG leader Gabor Vona to maintain the Garda's viability, at a minimum as a Movement, will keep them in the news during the summer's cucumber season political hiatus.

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